

Farewell to *FoodReview*

In February 2003, USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) will launch a new magazine to showcase ERS's research findings and data on food, agriculture, natural resources, and rural America. The new magazine is designed to better serve our clients by linking with the many reports, data series, and other features of our Web site. In this last issue of *FoodReview*, we thought our readers would enjoy a look back at the magazine's 63-year history.

FoodReview traces its roots to a 9-page mimeographed report, *The National Food Situation*, released on September 9, 1939. Prompted by concerns about the United States' ability to offset possible European food shortages caused by the outbreak of war in Europe, economists with USDA's Bureau of Agricultural Economics projected supplies of food products available for domestic consumption for the 1939-40 marketing year and compared these supplies with previous years. Total supplies of 18 commodities were adjusted for end-of-year carryovers, farm uses (seed and feed), and exports.

These supplies were divided by the U.S. population to derive per capita food quantities—much the same as ERS does today.

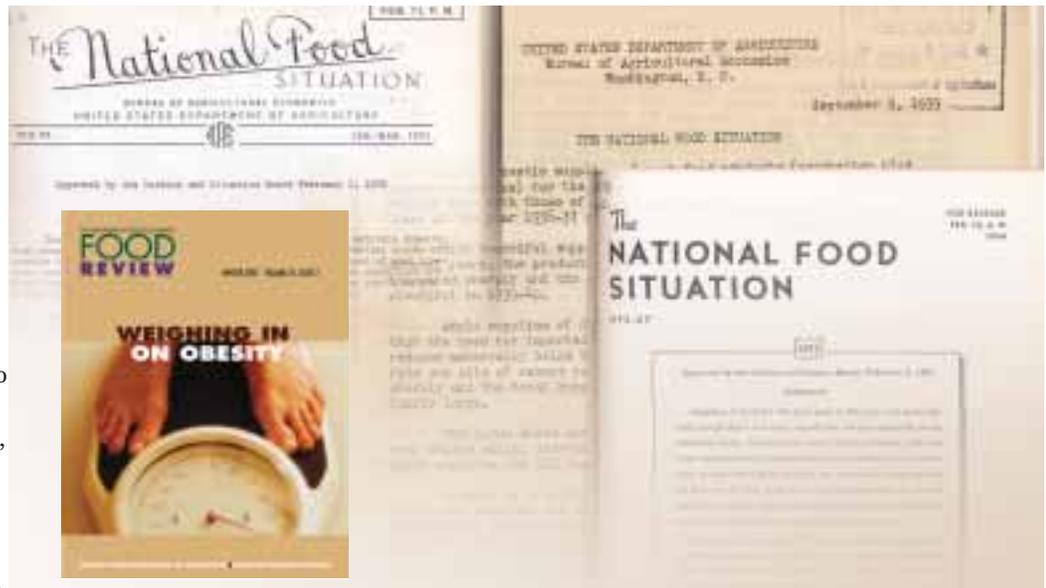
The Bureau of Agricultural Economics continued to release periodic reports in 1940 and 1941. In a December 18, 1941, press release, Secretary of Agriculture Claude R. Wickard stated, "As the President pointed out in his radio address the night of Pearl Harbor, the United States enters this war period with one asset no other nation has—plenty of food.... We have plenty for our own people, including the armed forces, and enough more to help feed

our Allies. The attached current issue of *The National Food Situation*, released today, should assure all our citizens and our Allies that our farmers will produce the food needed to win the war."

The National Food Situation became a formal publication in July 1942 and continued to report on the Nation's food supplies, demand for food, and food prices. Topics addressed over the next few years reflected the country's entry into World War II: decreased civilian supplies of canned foods, sugar, meats, and other foods; Government-imposed price ceilings on foods sold by retail stores; and restrictions on use of tin containers for food. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics continued publishing *The National Food Situation* until 1953, when the Agricultural Marketing Service took over the series. In 1961, ERS became the publisher of the quarterly report.

By 1961, the original 18 commodities had expanded to 53, including information on supplies of fish and seafood contributed by colleagues at the Department of the Interior. In addition, the publication began to feature special articles on such topics as food spending trends, marketing costs, Government food donation and food assistance programs, and longer term trends in U.S. eating patterns—issues that *FoodReview* still covered in 2002.

In 1978, *The National Food Situation* took on a new direction and a new name, *National Food Review*. Without abandoning its core areas of interest, the publication stepped up its coverage of the increasingly complex food marketing system. The publication became more magazine-like with by-lined individual articles, a contents page, art work, and sections reporting on food-related legislation and USDA regulatory actions. Special articles examined developments in food retailing and manufacturing, along with the away-from-home food sector. ERS research on consumer topics—relating health concerns to food choices,





alternative menus for schools, nutrient labeling changes—became a regular feature in the magazine.

Analysts shared their insights about new processing and packaging technologies and other changes brought about by advances in science, such as ultra-high temperature milk (1982), food irradiation (1983), and recombinant DNA (1984). Insights on food safety issues were offered, too, beginning with the consumer and regulatory issues raised by animal drug and pesticide residues, to ERS's more recent work in the area of microbial foodborne pathogens responsible for illnesses and food recalls.

In 1991, the magazine acquired its current name, *FoodReview*, to reflect the expanded international scope of its contents. Five years later, the magazine reached a new milestone, when it became available to Internet surfers. *FoodReview* continues to be one of the most frequently visited sites on the ERS Web site.

Over the course of the magazine's history, many issues important to the country in the early years remained important. Nutrition issues and the nutritive value of the food supply have been regularly highlighted in *The National Food Situation* and its successors. In the 1940s, the emphasis was on trying to increase or maintain consumption of important nutrients in times of war-induced food shortages. Today, ERS researchers continue to study the food choices that can lead to diets low in some nutrients (fiber, calcium, and iron),

while too high in others (saturated fat, cholesterol, and calories).

Trends in retail food prices and food spending have always been a focus of the publication. In April 1942, *The National Food Situation* reported that "retail prices of foods continued to rise ... but were still below pre-Depression levels." Later, ERS researchers analyzed the rapid food price inflation of the mid-1970s, the time lag between when changes in farm prices or other input costs show up on retail shelves, and the accuracy of the Consumer Price Index in capturing changing food prices. USDA economists have remained interested in aggregate U.S. food spending and food spending patterns of different demographic groups—the elderly, single mothers, Hispanics, high- and low-income consumers, and others.

And, it was not only domestic issues that were covered. From its start, the publication looked abroad—examining the effects of World War II on our ability to feed ourselves and our Allies. Throughout the years, analysts have assessed the dynamics of foreign markets for our farmers and food processors, as well as the growing presence of imported foods and investments by foreign food firms in the United States. Articles have discussed the implications of international trade agreements for producers and consumers, international licensing of foods and beverages, and U.S. food aid programs.

In the last few years, *FoodReview* has continued its evolution. Recognizing that much of ERS's data series are accessible through our Web site, the magazine has become more topical with special issues devoted to the restructuring occurring across the food and agricultural sectors, the impacts of welfare reform on food assistance programs, children's well-being, and the global food market. The new ERS magazine will continue *FoodReview's* tradition of objective, thorough analyses of the critical issues facing agriculture, consumers, rural America, and the environment. **FR**

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